

AN: This, in my opinion, is the best *Poison* story that I've written so far. I don't say that lightly, either. This is also the longest, so sit back, get comfortable, and enjoy what I'm sure is to be a very dramatic story.

Poison

Break

Sarafina lifted the joint to her mouth and sat back against a tree, sighing in relaxation. She smiled at her friend Sarabi, who was sat opposite her, also smoking marijuana. They were both quite high at the moment.

It had been about two weeks since Sarafina first discovered the 'wonders' of drugs, and ever since she had found herself completely hooked. There was something about the enriching feeling that they provided that just made her want more and more. Whenever she smoked a joint, or snorted a hit of Sumu, she felt happy. Content. Like nothing could ever bring her down.

Of course, the reality was that pure poison was running through her veins right now, and if she didn't try to kick the habit soon, then her health would only get worse and worse. She had been a pretty strong, attractive-looking lioness to begin with. Now, however, her eyes were often bloodshot and her claws were beginning to decay. Her addiction was a serious one, and it would take a big amount of willpower for her to get over it.

Not that Sarafina was interested in getting clean. Oh, no – not in the least. All she cared about right now was taking another toke and talking with her best friend about enlightening subjects such as how many lions they'd mated with over the past month or so.

"I swear to God, this Mixer thing is, like, huge," Sarabi said, taking a puff from her joint and grinning excitedly at Sarafina. "The guys just keep going at it and going at it and going at it! I was practically blind by the time it was over."

"You take anything before doing it?" Sarafina asked, knowing what the likely answer from Sarabi would be.

"A little bit of meth," Sarabi admitted, looking quite proud of herself. "Usually, uh... gets me in the mood, if you know what I mean." She gave her friend a cheeky wink. "You should try it sometime. It's totally off the hook."

"Maybe I will," Sarafina said, thinking about it as she continued to smoke her joint. "I haven't had a good screw in a while."

A third lioness was sat with Sarafina and Sarabi, watching the two with a faint smile, although she seemed way out of her depth hanging around with them. She appeared rather attractive, having been untainted by the drugs – for now, at least.

"You guys do this stuff at the parties, huh?" asked the lioness, watching them both with curiosity.

"Yeah, Maji," Sarafina said with a grin. "You ain't seen anything like it, girl. There's booze and sex and – best of all – some fine herbage, too." She raised her joint as a sign. "You can see it right here."

"I didn't know you guys were into this kind of stuff," Maji admitted, shifting uncomfortably on the spot. "This is just a bit more than staying out late when we were cubs."

"What are you talking about?" Sarabi said, narrowing her eyes. "Just chill, man. It's all good."

"Yeah," Sarafina agreed, reaching for her small stash of crystal meth which she kept in a plastic bag beside her. "Why don't you, uh... try some, huh?"

"Try some?" Maji eyed the bag of meth, unsure of what to do. She knew that she could trust Sarafina and Sarabi; they had been friends practically for ever. However, something just didn't seem right about these drugs... "Isn't this stuff supposed to be, like, dangerous? You get addicted, right?"

Sarafina and Sarabi exchanged a glance between each other, before staring at Maji.

"Do we look dangerous to you?" Sarafina asked, knowing that she had to get Maji to lighten up a bit. Once she had acquired a taste for the drugs, the three of them would be able to have fun every single day. It was a great idea!

Of course, it wasn't a great idea at all – but she was stoned out of her mind, so she didn't realise that at the time.

Maji stared back at them. "I guess not," she said, as Sarafina pushed the bag towards her. "So, uh... what do I do?"

"You snort it," Sarabi explained. "You know – through your nose. One bump and you'll be flying high for days."

Tearing open the bag with a claw, Maji reached down towards the pile, somewhat concerned that nothing good could come of this. But Sarafina and Sarabi were expecting her to try what they did, and it was the only way she would prove that she was just as mature as them. She was up for trying new things... What harm could it do?

The lioness snorted a sizeable quantity of the meth, before immediately feeling the onslaught of euphoria that it provided. Her head felt fuzzy and dizzy; a rush of energy flowed through her veins, driving her wild.

"Whoa!" Maji panted, rolling back and forth quickly on the ground. "This is... Oh, God, wow... My brain's on fire..."

Sarabi laughed. "Knew she'd like it."

"That's the real deal, yo," Sarafina said, finishing off her joint. "Let's all take turns and have a hit. It's the best we can get until more Sumu rolls in."

"I'm up for that," Maji said, still coming down from the initial high. Why the hell hadn't she tried this stuff before? It was fantastic! Sure, she couldn't think straight, but she felt better

than she did before.

Sarafina grinned, unaware that this would eventually turn out to be the death of Maji.

And so the three lionesses took turns in taking more hits of the meth, using up most of it and getting themselves incredibly intoxicated. They were all lying on the ground, giggling as they discussed males.

"His junk was, like, tiny," Sarabi said through half closed eyes. "And that's the last time I tried getting a boyfriend. Now I just live for the moment, if you get what I mean." The three of them laughed.

"Yeah," Sarafina agreed. "You wouldn't catch me getting another boyfriend. Not in a million years!"

Sarafina groaned as she awoke from the dream, having been experiencing memories of the past... A past that she loathed with a passion. Her days as a pathetic drug addict made her despise herself for all the wrong choices that she had made. All the people that she had hurt... It had been a disaster. The only good thing to come out of it was TPYMK, and even then she had treated him like dirt for a lot of the time.

TPYMK...

Sarafina's thoughts turned to the former detective, thinking of what had transpired between them earlier that day. The last thing that the lioness had expected to get when visiting McDonald's was a Happy Meal with a side order of McKissing from the last human on the planet.

She had made her mind up about him by now, though, and her feelings for TPYMK were more than clear in her head. The lioness was convinced, since she knew she wasn't insane, and she was no longer on drugs. There was nothing wrong with her, so her feelings had to be honest, didn't they?

However, her earlier words from the past echoed in her mind.

"You wouldn't catch me getting another boyfriend. Not in a million years!"

Sarafina said some stupid things when she was high.

The lioness crept out of bed and tiptoed down the hall, heading for TPYMK's bedroom. She slowly opened the door, listening to the loud creaking sound that it made in the process. Sarafina always wondered why things seemed so much louder at night. Merely blinking seemed to create a deafening noise that could wake the whole household up.

Luckily, it was just her and TPYMK who shared this house, so she only really had to worry about him.

She spotted the detective lying in his bed under the covers, sleeping silently. It was a lot better than her previous 'mate', Muerto, who snored so loudly that she had to sleep at least ten feet away from him so she wouldn't go mad.

If he is asleep, Sarafina thought, confronted with the chilling notion that TPYMK was actually awake and watching her like a hawk with x-ray vision. The guy practically had a sixth sense. *Still, you know what you're here for.*

Swallowing her fear, the lioness walked into the bedroom.

TPYMK awoke when he heard the bed sheets rustling.

Somebody's sleeping in my bed, he thought, knowing that he had suddenly been plunged into a demented version of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* – and he was the bear. *Or at least they're attempting to...*

With the speed of a panther, the former detective whipped round and grabbed an object from his bedside table, aiming it at the culprit who had decided to try and invade his serene place of rest.

"Get out of my bed, or I will shoot you where you lie," TPYMK threatened.

"Cool it, jerkoff," said an all too familiar voice. "And put that down. It's not a gun – it's a banana!"

TPYMK glanced at the object in his hand, realising that it was indeed a banana. His pistol lay right next to where he'd left it on the bedside table. He made a mental note never to put a gun-shaped foodstuff next to his actual weapon ever again.

"Jesus," Sarafina whispered, rolling her eyes. "Did you think someone was trying to screw you while you slept or something?"

"Sarafina, my previous worries pale in comparison to the fact that you have *clambered into my bed under the covers in the middle of the night*," TPYMK replied, staring at her in total disbelief. "What on earth were you thinking?" He hoped that she wasn't high right now. He doubted it, but one could never be too careful...

"This is what couples do," Sarafina whispered, making eye contact with the last human on the planet. "They, uh... share the same bed, don't they?"

TPYMK stared at her for a few moments, before letting out a loud sigh that conveyed both shock and surrender. He rolled over, facing away from Sarafina, and closed his eyes, hoping that he would fall asleep very quickly.

Sarafina lay there watching him for a few moments. He made no indication that he was going to speak another word – or even move a muscle, no less – so she decided to get into a comfortable position and go to sleep herself.

And, strangely enough, the resounding slumber in each other's company was incredibly peaceful for both of them.

Sarafina awoke with a yawn, rolling over in bed to look at

TPYMK, who she assumed would be lying right beside her. Hopefully, the former detective had gotten the message last night and knew what the lioness wanted from him...

But he wasn't there.

"Hmm?" The lioness sat up in bed, staring at the empty space where TPYMK should have been. She was still under the covers. He had just slipped right out without her even noticing... Then again, she was a heavy sleeper, so it was no surprise.

"Goddamn it..."

She slipped out of bed, padding out of the room and heading for the kitchen. If he was still inside the house, then that was where he would be. Making breakfast, hopefully. The rumbling in her stomach told Sarafina that she was quite hungry. Perhaps a slice of cheese on toast would solve that problem...

"One strip of cheese?" Sarafina said, sat at the table as she stared down at her plate. A single strip of cheese had been placed across her slice of toast. "I've found more cheese between my toes than this."

"I thought you hated cheese?" mumbled TPYMK, busy cleaning a glass. He was always cleaning in the mornings. Sarafina wondered whether he was obsessive over it or something. Maybe it just kept him thinking; she didn't know. "You said I gave you it all the time, so I thought reducing the amount would appease you."

"No, it's... it's fine," Sarafina said, taking a bite out of the toast. "So, uh... you sleep well?"

TPYMK gave her what she thought was a brief nod, before immediately changing the subject. "We've got work to do," he told her, which was a sentence that the lioness could say in her sleep by now. "Something's come up."

"Oh, wow," Sarafina said, disappointed that they weren't discussing – in her opinion, at least – more important matters.

"What is it this time? Is the trash out to get us?"

"There's a new Sumu business in town," TPYMK revealed, much to Sarafina's shock.

"What?" she exclaimed. "No way, man. We torched all of that gunk; it ain't coming back!"

"Wrong," TPYMK said. "A new group of distributors have obviously scavenged whatever they could get their claws on and are now dealing it to more users. Typical. Stop one operation and another starts up right away."

"Who the hell are they?" Sarafina asked. She didn't know of anyone who would start dealing again. None of her old friends from her days as an addict, anyway.

"Do you know of a group called the 'Family'?" TPYMK asked, sitting down opposite Sarafina at the table.

"The Family?" She thought for a moment, and then shook her head. "No."

"You're sure?"

"Yeah, I'm sure," Sarafina said. "I think I'd remember that name, you know, if it was going around. Must be a new thing – and I have nothing to do with it anymore. I'm clean, jerkoff."

"I know you are," TPYMK said, "but you have experience. Knowledge that I don't have. No wonder you make for such a useful partner."

Sarafina twitched upon hearing the word 'partner'. *That can mean more than one thing*, she thought to herself. *God, this sucks...*

"So, uh... we gotta stop 'em, huh?" Sarafina presumed. "Even though you're not a cop anymore?"

"I've been thinking," TPYMK said. "If we want to get on HPD's good side, then we're going to have to prove that we're the

good guys."

"Even though you just poisoned a cop," Sarafina reminded him. "Oh, yeah – that's so gonna impress them."

"They don't know anything about that," TPYMK said, knowing that his poisoning of Detective Bora via ricin was virtually untraceable. "And they're not going to. I'm talking about the rest of the police force. God knows what that rude lion has told everyone else there."

"So, if we stop this... Family, then we're good to go?" Sarafina said, hoping that was the case.

"We should be," TPYMK said. "We let them arrest a few scumbags, get caught on camera doing it, and we become heroes. No more suspicions. No more interrogations. No more trouble. Isn't that what you want?"

"Yeah," Sarafina lied, neglecting to mention that there was one other thing she wanted. "Whatever, man."

"Okay," TPYMK said, standing up. "The first thing you'll have to do is buy a small quantity of Sumu from a dealer."

"What?" Sarafina's eyes widened in shock. "Why the hell would you make me do that?"

"So you can ask about the Family," TPYMK said. "Find out who they are. You'll just come across as a curious customer; it's nothing to be scared of."

"You think it's safe to put Sumu back in my paws?" Sarafina asked, thinking back to her days as a useless addict.

TPYMK stared into her eyes. "Sarafina, I trust you more than anyone else," he said. "I'm hardly under the impression that as soon as you buy that Sumu you're going to snort half of it and get high. You're far beyond that, I'm sure."

"Right," Sarafina said, touched by how much faith he had in her. "Cool."

"Finish your toast and clean yourself up," TPYMK said, walking out of the kitchen. "We start this afternoon."

"A new lead?" Bora stared at Askari with narrowed eyes. "I hope this was worth missing my coffee for."

"Z's back in town," Askari said, prompting a curious glance from Bora.

"Z?" Bora rolled his eyes. "Not that slut again."

"Yeah," Askari said. "Apparently, she's upgraded from small-time weed dealer to A-grade Sumu emperor."

"Where'd you hear this from?" Bora inquired. "One of the dealers gone blabbermouth on her?"

"No," Askari said. "Just general rumours amongst the users. Those dealers aren't gonna talk when she's paying them so well."

"Damn it," Bora cursed, sick of the fact that the situation was worsening with each passing day. He wasn't getting anywhere with TPYMK, and this new Sumu business only managed to aggravate him even further. "Where the hell is she?"

Askari shrugged. "Beats me," he said. "Could be in the middle of desert, or at the bottom of the ocean. Who knows?"

"Probably in some whorehouse somewhere," Bora remarked. "I wouldn't be surprised if she was related to TPYMK's little prostitute."

"The fact of the matter is Sumu sales keep going up," Askari said. "It's getting serious. We might have another Death on our paws."

"We'll see about that," Bora muttered. "Don't worry – I'll look into it."

"You sure?" Askari didn't look so certain. "You're not going to go after this TPYMK guy again?"

"I said don't worry," Bora replied, more sternly this time. "I'll take care of things."

TPYMK almost dropped his bottle of chocolate milk in horror when he saw what Sarafina was doing in the living room.

The lioness lay lazily across the sofa, a blanket draped over her midsection as she watched the TV. A bowl of cheese puffs sat in her lap, which she was greedily eating from. Her fur looked untidy and poorly groomed.

In short, she was a mess.

"Sarafina?" he cried. "What the hell are you doing?"

"Watching the box," she replied through a mouthful of cheese puffs. "What does it look like?"

TPYMK walked over to the lioness, staring at the TV. "*Power Rangers*?" he said. "Why in God's name are you watching that?"

"You kidding me?" Sarafina said. "It's the bomb."

TPYMK rolled his eyes and picked up the TV remote, shutting it off.

"Hey – what the hell, man?" Sarafina exclaimed. "I was totally getting into that!"

"You can watch teenagers save the world from Japanese stock footage later," TPYMK said. "I told you that we have work to do! And I said to clean yourself up, which, I might add, you have done the total opposite of! You look all greasy and... unkempt."

"Well, duh, genius!" Sarafina said, getting up from the sofa. "A Sumu user isn't exactly gonna look like they've just had a royal makeover, are they? I'm trying to look the part."

Realisation slowly dawned on TPYMK. "Oh," he said, finally getting it. "So you're trying to look like the average drug user?"

"Yeah," Sarafina said. "What the hell else would I be doing?"

Look..." She lifted up one of her hind paws. "I even made my nails look jagged."

"Jagged and purple," TPYMK remarked, nodding. "Oh, they're gonna be fooled with ease."

"You want this to work," Sarafina said, "and I'm going to make sure that it does."

TPYMK studied her for a moment. "I have to say, you seem more invested in this than I thought you would be," he told her, reflecting on how reluctant she'd seemed to do a job for him in the past. "Where's the sudden interest come from?"

"You care about me, and I care about you," Sarafina said, pointing at him with a claw. "We're in this together, right?"

TPYMK nodded. "Right."

"You sure you're ready?" TPYMK said, looking away from the windscreen to examine Sarafina. She still very much looked the part, slouched in her seat, hind paws up on the glove compartment while she tapped her purple claws rhythmically on the surface.

She looked how she wanted to: like a lazy drug addict with no ambition.

"Yep," Sarafina said, now sporting a beanie hat on her head. That just completed the look. "Ready as a rat." She examined the jungle surroundings outside the Junk-Mobile. "How'd you know this is where the dealers hang, anyway?"

"I did my research," TPYMK said. He hadn't told her that he had been here previously – and almost ended up putting a bullet in Moto's mouth. "Trust me, you'll find plenty of dealers here. You got the money?"

"Yeah." The lioness raised her paw, clasped in which was a wad of notes. "Should be enough for a bag or two of Sumu."

"You just want a small amount," TPYMK reminded her. "And then you try and get as much information as possible – but don't seem too nosey. You don't want them to think that you're an undercover cop."

"Would an undercover cop dress like this?" Sarafina asked, gesturing to her untidy state.

"I suppose not," TPYMK said. "Still, be careful."

"I've done this gig hundreds of times before," she told him, climbing out of the car through the passenger door. "Don't worry. I'll get it done."

"Meet me back here within half an hour," TPYMK instructed. "If you fail to return by that time, then I'm going in."

"Whatever, man," Sarafina said. She gave him a weak salute. "See ya."

TPYMK watched as she disappeared into the trees. "Good luck."

"Well, well, well, if it isn't my favourite sexy lioness," Moto grinned as Sarafina sauntered into view. "What brings you around here, Purple Pussy?"

Sarafina had decided that approaching Moto would be the best option, since he was less likely to find her suspicious than the other dealers that were prowling around the jungle. She'd known him for quite a while now, and he wasn't going to think that she'd turned rat on the drug empire anytime soon. He was far too stupid for that.

"Hey, Moto," she said, bumping him on the paw. "How's it hanging?"

"Long and hard when you're around," Moto quipped. He never seemed to stop flirting with the lioness; she deeply regretted sleeping with him, even if it was only meant to assist her in poisoning the little creep. And that hadn't worked, so what was the point?

"I hear, uh... you're slinging now," Sarafina said, checking to make sure that nobody was watching. "Can you hook me up with a hit?"

"Funny how that works, isn't it?" Moto replied. "You were dealing to me, and now I'm dealing to you. It's the Circle of Sumu!" He laughed in his usual obnoxious way.

"Yeah," Sarafina said. "So... you got something for me?"

"Aw, I'd love to give it to you for free," Moto said, almost looking apologetic. "But my boss would bite my balls off if I did that – and I'm talking in the literal sense, if you know what I mean."

"Don't sweat it," Sarafina said, waving the money that TPYMK had given her in front of the cub's face. "How much?"

"For you, all of it," Moto said, taking the lioness's money. He reached into a bush and pulled out a nicely sized bag of Sumu. "Here you go. Thank you for flying high with Air Moto."

Sarafina took the Sumu from the cub, studying it for a moment. "Bags are bigger than before," she noticed. "What's up?"

"Yo, get this – they can *afford* to give us more," Moto explained. "Word on the street is that they're picking up a new cook. Looks like we'll all be living it up all night and day from now on."

Sarafina chuckled, playing along with him. "That's what I'm talking about, baby," she said. "So who's in charge nowadays?"

"Well, ever since Death went... dead on everyone, these new guys are in town," Moto told her, seemingly happy to spill every little secret about the new Sumu business. "They call themselves the Family of Blood. Is that not a choice name or what?"

"Family of Blood, huh?" said Sarafina. That was quite a title. Typical of a family that specialised in drug dealing.

"I'm working for them *personally*," Moto said, proud of himself.

"They give me a new batch to sell practically every day. This is *the life*, Sarafina. I get all the hits I want and all I've gotta do is hand out the stuff."

A sudden idea entered the lioness's head. A brainwave of sorts. One that was sure to make TPYMK pleased. That was her goal in all of this, anyway; do everything that he said and then maybe they would have a conversation about their relationship.

And, hopefully, this recent idea of hers would help immensely.

"It's as simple as that?" Sarafina asked, eliciting a nod from Moto.

"Yeah, man," he said. "Easy as my junk on a Saturday night."

"Think you can... introduce me to them?" Sarafina said, taking a step towards the cub. "I'm kinda in need of some serious cheddar, Moto. Fat stacks, you know what I'm talking about?"

"You wanna be a dealer?" Moto said, endless possibilities forming in his mind. "Oh, wow – that would be the bomb! We could be, like, partners. Mega Moto and his sexy sidekick Purple Pussy!"

"Whatever you say," retorted Sarafina. "So you can get me in?"

"Get you in?" said Moto. "I can get you in so deep that you won't get out. Me and the Family are tighter than you, S – and I know that from experience."

A grin spread across Sarafina's face. "Cool," she said. "When do I get to meet 'em?"

"Yo, you are not gonna *believe* what I've just done for us," Sarafina said, climbing into the passenger seat of the Junk-Mobile with an excited smile. "I mean, it's like, *big*, man. *Superhuge*!"

"You sure you're not high?" TPYMK asked, causing Sarafina to give him the death glare. "Never mind – just tell me what

happened."

"Turns out my old pal Moto was one of the dealers," Sarafina explained, placing the bag of Sumu that she'd purchased on the dashboard. "Not only did I find out who's running this whole operation, but I got us a meet."

"A meet?" TPYMK's expression changed to one of curiosity. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that I can get us in there," Sarafina told him. "I can go and talk to these guys and find out *everything*. Is this perfect or what?"

TPYMK stared out of the windscreen, sitting in thought for a few moments. Sarafina watched him carefully. She was expecting a happy response by this point; maybe even another kiss, but that was just wishful thinking.

"You saw Moto?" he finally said.

Sarafina nodded. "Yeah."

"The same Moto who should be dead by today?"

The lioness's face immediately fell. "Oh—"

"Are you *kidding* me?" TPYMK yelled, staring at Sarafina in disbelief. "*Seriously?* You had that worthless junkie right where you wanted him – *you were in his house* – and you didn't slip the ricin in? All that time, and you completely failed in what was supposed to be a simple task!"

"Hey, come on, man, it's not like that—"

"Do you still have feelings for him?" TPYMK interrupted. "Is that it?"

"Something came up," Sarafina said, trying to explain why she had failed to poison Moto when she had the chance. "I tried, but —"

"Don't give me that," TPYMK said. "You were just too much of a

coward to do it."

"Oh, yeah?" Sarafina challenged. "Well, jerkoff, maybe if you just *listened*, then you'd know that me not bumping the guy off has actually helped us with this whole Family thing. Why don't you think about that, huh, dummy?"

"He can get me arrested for—"

"He's a dealer, yo," Sarafina said. "He's not gonna go talking to the cops ever again. He's working for this Family now, making fat stacks, so why the hell would he even bother? Another thing for you to think about." The lioness slumped in her seat, sulking in disappointment.

A long moment of silence followed.

"Where is this meet, then?" TPYMK finally asked.

"Why do you care?" said Sarafina bluntly. "If you're too jerked off about Moto still being alive then I'll just go and take care of it by myself."

"You will do no such thing," TPYMK said. "Now, tell me about it."

The lioness sighed. "It's at some shack halfway across town," she said. "Moto says that where they're holed up."

"Hey, Bora."

Detective Bora stopped on his way to the records department upon hearing Maarifa's voice. He had been planning on scouring the place once again, hoping in vain that he would find some remnant of TPYMK's past there. It was a pointless effort, but his life seemed to revolve around that enigmatic detective these days.

"What is it, Maarifa?" Bora asked, leaning against her desk. "I'm kinda busy right now."

"I found something on that TPYMK guy," Maarifa revealed, instantly catching the detective's attention.

"Huh?" Bora leaned in closer. "What is it?"

"APD found a photocopy of his file buried away in their basement," she explained. "Hidden in a box with a bunch of other folders. They were planning to recycle it, but I told them to keep hold of the box just in case you wanted to take a look."

"Have it delivered here," Bora demanded. "*Now.*"

"You got it," Maarifa nodded.

Bora grinned, feeling like things were looking up for the first time in a long while. *Looks like I finally got my break.*

"Looks like a dump," Sarafina said, leaning in through the driver's window of the Junk-Mobile. "If Death's business was a goldmine, then this is what I picked out of my nose last night."

It was the next day. As arranged, Sarafina had agreed to meet Moto outside the Family of Blood's current headquarters at exactly noon. TPYMK had advised her to have a little look at the area from afar first. He would have done so himself, but he didn't want anyone to catch him snooping around.

"It's not exactly high class, then," TPYMK concluded, sat in the driver's seat, hands gripping the steering wheel. The Junk-Mobile was parked at the edge of a large forest, which dominated the other side of town.

"May not be high class, but they're slinging some serious S," the lioness replied. "Definitely major league."

"Now, remember what I said," TPYMK told her. "You listen, don't ask. Tell me everything they say, do as they tell you, and make sure you study the area. We need to know as much as possible."

"Yeah. I got it," Sarafina said. "I won't screw this up like last time. I'll make sure of it."

"You'd better," TPYMK warned. "I want no more mistakes."

"Jesus Christ!" Sarafina exclaimed. "Give me a goddamn break!"

TPYMK frowned. "I've given you enough breaks."

"Whatever, man." Frustrated, Sarafina turned around, walking off down a path that sloped into the forest beyond. "Jerkoff..."

TPYMK sat back in his seat. *Hopefully, you'll listen this time.*

"You should be a drug yourself, Sarafina," Moto said, staring at the lioness as she walked over to him. "'Cause you get me high."

The cub was leaning against the brick wall of a rundown shack where the Family of Blood were staying. This was where Moto had been picking up his batches of Sumu from so he could deal them to the users.

"What's up, Moto?" Sarafina said, looking over the shack as she stood in front of him. It looked more like the place drug addicts would stay, rather than the dealers. Still, a place like this wasn't likely to arouse suspicion. That was probably the Family of Blood's thinking by choosing this place.

"This is it, dude," Moto said, hitting the wall with a paw. "The big break. You're gonna make some serious cheddar with the Family. I'm practically rolling in it."

"Seriously?" Sarafina asked, interested to see just how much money the cub was making.

"Yeah," Moto said, grinning. "In fact, I *snort* with money now! Had a hit or two an hour before I came here. I'm still coming down from the high."

"Awesome," Sarafina said. "So... how do we go about this, huh?"

"I'll introduce you, they'll tell you the gig, and ya make a sweet deal with them," Moto explained. "Easy. They might even start

you dealing today."

"Then let's do this," Sarafina said, nodding. She felt confident. She would show TPYMK that she could be his faithful partner. In more ways than one, hopefully...

"Right on!" exclaimed Moto. "This is gonna be *wild!*"

Moto led Sarafina down a dark corridor, with no illumination whatsoever. It was particularly unnerving, she thought – but she would be damned if she was going to chicken out now. Not now, not ever. She was going through with this, and she would succeed. She was determined.

The corridor finally opened out onto a dark, musty room. The lioness could see a long metal table in front of her with a few wooden chairs placed behind. A few empty bowls of something – soup, Sarafina guessed – lay discarded on the surface.

"Nice place," Sarafina remarked, adjusting the beanie hat on her head. "Roomy."

"It's awesome!" Moto said. "We've had, like, a trillion meetings here."

"Four," said a new voice.

Sarafina watched carefully as a lioness entered through a doorway at the back of the room, staring hard at her.

Jesus, she's ugly, Sarafina thought.

"We've had four meetings," said the lioness, sitting down at the table. "I hope you're not high again, Moto."

"Nah," Moto lied, waving a paw in the air. "I'm totally cool."

Sarafina spotted a cub following in the lioness's wake. Another female, with electric blue eyes that seemed incredibly unsettling, for some reason.

"So this is our new subject," the cub said, sitting in the chair

beside her mother. "She certainly *looks* like one of Moto's friends."

"Better not be taking more of my cut," another voice rambled. A lanky lion stumbled in after them, frantically scratching the back of his neck. Sarafina could tell instantly that he was a serious addict. "I need my cut – I want my cut – I need to get high – good and high..."

"Zip it, Nuka," said the lioness, as he collapsed into a chair on her other side. "We have business to attend to." She glowered at Sarafina. "So... who is your friend, Moto?"

"Ladies and germs, this is the incredible Sarafina!" Moto proclaimed, as if introducing a magnificent circus act. "We go back. Like, way back."

"Another valued customer of Death's, I presume?" said the lioness.

Sarafina decided on what she was going to say. "Actually, I, um... used to deal for Death a while back, too."

"Hmm," said the lioness. "A veteran. Interesting." She smiled. "My name is Zira. This is my daughter Vitani, and my son Nuka. We are the Family of Blood."

"Cool," said Sarafina. "I hear you're in the business."

"Yes," Zira said, "and Moto here tells me that you want to deal for us. Is that right?"

"Sure," Sarafina said. "I need the cash. Sumu supply's been dry lately, so I've been out of a job, practically. But if I can get in on this gig, then that'd be choice, yo."

Zira motioned to a chair in front of them. "Have a seat, Sarafina," she offered, looking surprisingly friendly. Sarafina guessed that she was already doing much better than Moto. She wasn't incredibly irritating, for a start.

"Thanks," she said, sitting down. Her heart was beating madly,

but she tried to ignore that. Nothing seemed wrong at the moment. Everything was going according to plan. All she had to do was be silent and listen to what they had to say.

"So... how much were you dealing before?" Vitani asked.

"Can't remember the exact quota, but it was a lot," Sarafina explained. "It was at those parties they used to run. You know – those really wild ones? Pretty big haul for high-paying users."

"You know the job, then," Zira said. "You might just end up becoming one of our top dealers, Sarafina."

Sarafina shrugged. "You give me the job, I'll do whatever you want," she replied. "No prob."

Zira's smile seemed to widen. "Very well, then," she replied, reaching underneath the table. "There is just one more thing, though."

"What?"

"Have you... tried the product, Sarafina?" Zira asked, dumping an open bag of Sumu and a knife down on the table in front of Sarafina.

Sarafina eyed the bag, before looking up at Zira. "Yeah," she said, not entirely sure where this was going. "Of course."

"Well..." Picking up the knife, Zira used the edge to scoop up a small quantity of the substance. "Just to prove to us that you are a true player in the industry... hit it."

Sarafina's blood turned cold.

"S-sorry?" she stammered.

Zira raised the knife to eye level. All Sarafina could look at was the Sumu on the end of it.

"You heard me," said Zira, narrowing her eyes. "Hit it."

Sarafina blinked a few times, feeling like crying. In that

moment, she realised that she was well and truly doomed. There was no chance of her escaping this place with these maniacs, and her only other option was to do the one thing that she swore she would never do ever again.

To snort Sumu.

Swallowing hard, tears forming in her eyes, the lioness slowly leant forward, accepted her fate, and snorted the Sumu from the end of the knife.

Gasping, the sheer force of the high sent Sarafina flying right back into her seat. Her vision immediately blurred, more due to her crying than the effects of the drug.

She was far too wrapped up in this to realise that Zira had leapt across the table and pounced on top of Sarafina, sending her crashing onto the ground.

Suddenly, some semblance of realisation crossed her mind, as she felt herself being punched repeatedly in the face by the lioness. She slowly started to zone out, though, as every impact caused her to slip further and further away from reality.

"*You little rat!*" screamed Zira, although Sarafina was far too out of it to hear this. "*No one rats on the Family of Blood!*"

Sobbing and crying, as the high went incredibly wrong and she slipped away into unconsciousness, the last thing Sarafina could remember was pain and pretty colours...

TPYMK felt hollow as the doctor led him down the hospital corridor, his mind reeling with dreadful thoughts and his body overcome with worry.

"She was brought in about two hours ago," the doctor, a golden eagle called Tajiri, explained to him. "Her blood pressure was sky high, and she was already in shock. Toxicology reports came back as positive for Sumu use."

"Sumu use?" TPYMK exclaimed.

"Yes," said Tajiri. "Some lion cub brought her in. Said her first time using it had gone all wrong, and she ended up giving herself severe bruising to her face. The drug is often known to cause horrific hallucinations as well as euphoric ones, and I suspect the former took its toll on her."

"Where the hell is she?" TPYMK demanded.

"In here," said Tajiri, opening a set of double doors that led to another room

TPYMK followed her inside, listening to Tajiri as she stopped in the doorway.

"She's since stabilised, so she's resting now," she said. "You can still see her, though – but just... keep it quiet, okay?"

"Of course," TPYMK nodded. "Thank you."

Tajiri shot him a slight smile before leaving, the doors shutting behind her.

TPYMK was left alone.

The room was silent and all the lights had been turned off. Only the sunlight forcing its way through the drawn blue curtains created a similar colour of illumination. The steady beeping of a heart monitor could be heard, and it was hooked up to the only other form of life in the room.

Lying, asleep in the hospital bed, was Sarafina.

TPYMK hoped dearly that he was wrong, and he had the wrong lioness. Maybe this was some other poor soul who had become a victim of a violent attack...

One quick glimpse of the purple toenails protruding from the bottom end of the covers proved otherwise, though.

Slowly, TPYMK walked over to the motionless lioness, staring at her with solemn eyes. One side of her face had been badly bruised, and was terribly swollen. Her face looked like an ugly

purple mess. It didn't look like Sarafina was going to wake up anytime soon. Strangely enough, she looked somewhat peaceful, in a deranged sort of way.

Feeling as though he couldn't stand up anymore, the former detective slipped into a chair beside the bed, his body numb with grief.

Unable to take his eyes off the lioness, TPYMK did the only thing he could think of.

He slipped his hand under the covers, and gently held Sarafina's paw.

The last human on earth sat there for quite some time, the rhythmic beeping of the heart monitor sending him into a stupor.

AN: Wow. So many things happened here, and it's just crazy. I'm very proud of this story, though, and it's definitely the best so far for me. I don't know what your reactions are going to be, so I'll have to wait and see. I hope you enjoyed it, though!